

Amherst Health Department

Fiscal Year 2002

The mission of the Amherst Board of Health, working through the Health Department, is to promote the health and well-being of our community. We fulfill this mission through our core functions: assessment, assurance, promotion, and policy development.

Assurance: ensuring that all Amherst residents have the services necessary to maintain or restore good health, either by coordinating the delivery of services by other agencies, by policy or regulation development, or by providing services directly

Assessment: systematically collecting, assembling, analyzing, and making information available regarding the health of the community, including statistics on health status, community health needs, and epidemiological studies of health problems

Promotion: providing services and educational opportunities that encourage healthy environments and healthy lifestyles

Policy Development: development and implementation of comprehensive public health policies, regulations and legislation.

The work of the Amherst Health Department is organized into five major areas: Access to Health Care, Infectious Disease Control, Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Environmental Health, and Health Policy. This year we added a sixth focus area, Emergency Preparedness.

I. Access to Health Care

Ensuring access to health care for all Amherst residents continues to be a priority for the Department. Many of our programs focus on assuring access to health care for Amherst residents. Some of these programs are: Hampshire Health Connect, "Peace in the Family: a Khmer Community Project", Latino Health and the Convalescent Equipment Loan Program.

Hampshire Health Connect

Hampshire Health Connect (HHC) is a nonprofit organization created by a group of citizens, providers and representatives of local government, business and the insurers. Its aim is to link families and individuals who are underinsured or who have no health insurance with insurance programs that they may be eligible for, or to medical providers willing to see HHC patients for free or on a sliding fee scale. The HHC is housed in Cooley Dickinson Hospital. The Health Director, Epi Bodhi, is currently secretary of the Board of Directors of HHC.

Cambodian Health

Many Cambodian Americans live in the Amherst area. The Department has identified many unmet needs of this population. "Peace in the Family: A Khmer Community Project" continues to grow. Funded by a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, this program employs a full-time outreach worker, Lauren Srey. This year, we received additional funding from the Women's Health Network to work closely with a small group of Cambodian women. Our goal was to educate these women, who are between the ages of forty and eighty years old, about breast cancer. Our outreach staff continues to provide regular individual support for the Cambodian community.

Latino Health

During this fiscal year, the primary focus of Jackeline Torres, the Latino Outreach Worker, was to assist Amherst's newcomer Latino population concerning the issues of breast health and domestic abuse prevention and to help them link with appropriate community services. She has developed positive relationships with many members of this community as well as the agencies that serve them.

Tapestry Health Services

Tapestry Health Systems continues to provide a family planning clinic for Amherst residents on Tuesday evenings at the Amherst Health Department. This is an exciting partnership, because it offers both Tapestry and the Health Department opportunities for referrals, especially for the newcomer groups with whom we are working.

Convalescent Equipment Lending Program

Karen Erman, Health Department Office Administrator, accepts convalescent equipment such as walkers, commodes, shower benches, tub safety rails, canes, crutches, and a limited number of wheelchairs through donations and maintains a loan closet for citizens in need. Twenty-one Amherst residents borrowed thirty pieces of convalescent equipment during FY 02.

II. Infectious Disease Control

Controlling the spread of communicable diseases and food-borne illnesses is an important function of the Health Department.

Infectious Disease Surveillance and Control during FY 02 included the following:

- preventative treatment and control of 4 cases involving Tuberculosis
- distribution of 17,100 doses of vaccine to nine Amherst providers
- provided vaccines for flu, pneumonia, and tetanus to 425 residents at the annual flue clinic, in conjunction with the Council on Aging
- provided 251 immunizations to adults and children at monthly immunization clinics
- received reports of 3 cases of Salmonella, 3 cases of Giardia, 9 cases of Campylobacter, 2 cases of Chickenpox, and 10 cases of Pertussis, 6 cases of Hepatitis, 7 cases of Lyme Disease.

III. Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

Programs aimed at promoting health and preventing disease is another important aspect of the Health Department's work.

Youth Health

Collaboration between the School Nursing Leader, Robbin Suprenant, and the Public Health Nurse, Julie Federman, has continued. Monthly meetings between nursing and administrative staffs have resulted in:

- Hepatitis B immunizations for 95 school children
- participation in school health advisory meetings, development of a sub-committee focusing on school policy around tobacco use
- collaboration with schools to ensure access to immunizations.

High-Risk Groups

Programs aimed at promoting health and preventing disease are another important aspect of the Health Department's work. Programs and interventions are for the general public or are targeted to certain groups that are at increased health risk because of their membership in a particular demographic group, the consequences of their own behavior, or the behavior of others.

Alcohol and Substance Abuse Education

The Health Director continues to be active in several Town, University, and school efforts to examine alcohol abuse, underage drinking, and substance abuse. Results of a high school survey of students' abuse of alcohol and drugs revealed a serious situation. The Amherst Board of Health received a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to help address this problem of substance abuse in the high school. This has enabled us to hire a Health Educator, Kathy Wicks, to help coordinate the work of the Amherst Drug Free Communities Partnership. The Partnership has worked hard to support existing local programs that develop leadership skills of youth in the community. The Partnership has also explored other strategies of substance-use prevention and will continue to initiate action in this regard.

The Partnership's Media Campaign committee funded a print media campaign which targeted risk-seeking youth; it was created with the assistance of youth, the YWCA, and a prevention specialist from the Massachusetts Prevention Center. It is expected to be launched in the fall of 2002. Currently the partnership is engaged in the process of developing networks and building bridges within Amherst's diverse community to support a comprehensive effort towards reducing substance use among youth in the community.

Tobacco Control

The Amherst Tobacco Control Program Coordinator, Marlene Barnett, has continued to be active in local policy promotion and enforcement efforts, as well as regional policy promotion, to reduce tobacco sales to underage youth and educate the public about environmental tobacco smoke (ETS). As of FY 01, the Board of Health Tobacco Control Program Scope of Services no longer included direct sponsorship of tobacco treatment activities. Highlights of tobacco control activities in FY 02 are as follows:

- Tobacco Treatment Activities: The Amherst Tobacco Control Program publicized and promoted one 5-week class in collaboration with Tapestry Health Systems tobacco treatment programs. Staff successfully advocated for a Tapestry Health Systems Tobacco Treatment counselor to see Amherst clients in the Bangs Center so that they need not cross the Coolidge Bridge during construction.
- Policy Promotion and Enforcement to Reduce Youth Access to Tobacco Products: Twenty-five tobacco retail licenses were issued and nine compliance checks of tobacco retailers were performed. In eighty-six per cent of compliance checks, tobacco retailers did not sell tobacco products to minors. Tobacco retailers each received free merchant-education materials to remind employees to consistently check for identification. Staff also distributed merchant-education materials from the Attorney General's office to all tobacco retailers. The posting of correct signage was checked twice this fiscal year. Three tobacco retailers had their licenses suspended for up to 21 days this year for continued violations even after repeated warnings from the Amherst Board of Health. Seven tobacco retailers received deferred license suspensions.
- Policy Promotion and Enforcement to Reduce Public Exposure to Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS): Print ads and mentions were purchased from UMass *Daily Collegian*, WFCR and WMUA to remind policymakers, UMass students, faculty and staff that all Amherst restaurants and bars are smoke-free. Enforcement of the smoke-free regulations is ongoing and frequent, and compliance with the smoke-free regulations by the bars continues to improve.
- Community Awareness Activities: Tobacco Control staff continued to collaborate with the Tobacco Free Hampshire County Community Mobilization Network. Staff participated in the Life is Better Smoke Free regional project. Informational tables were present at the SAFE Graduation, Haigis Hoopla and the Amherst Fire Department Open House.

IV. Environmental Issues

The Environmental Health Services Department consists of David Zaroinski, Sanitarian; Tom Dion, Assistant Sanitarian; and Kelli Kydd, Program Assistant I. It has been successful in its goal of encompassing education as well as enforcement. In FY 02, Environmental Health Services conducted 1,045 inspections implementing regulations and issued 303 permits.

Food Safety

The eighty-four food handlers in Amherst, including retail, bakery and catering (but not including mobile and temporary food vendors), are currently inspected four times a year. Since the state's adoption of the 1999 Federal Food Code, the Health Department has worked to help local restaurants comply. The code requires that all restaurants have a person in charge (PIC) who has knowledge of food-borne disease prevention and application of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles.

Along with the HACCP principles, we have helped train personnel at the food establishments to be trained in anti-choking procedures. This year will include continued monitoring of food managers to obtain Food Manager certification and to develop a food protection program in multiple languages.

Body Art Establishments

The number of applications for body art establishments has increased, and Environmental Health Services has developed and implemented new Body Art and Massage Therapy regulations.

Septic Systems

The Title Five-Betterment Program has been successfully completed. The Town has so far lent \$102,485.93 for septic system repairs. The Board of Health granted four variances to Title V. The Department has developed a database of all septic systems in Amherst so that we can better protect the environment by monitoring the areas experiencing difficulties with their systems.

Recreational Camps

The number of recreational camps in the Town has increased, as has the number of children attending these camps. As a result, increased monitoring and more numerous inspections are needed to maintain quality and compliance in operation of these camps.

Housing

The Health Department is working to ensure that all residents are provided with safe, high-quality housing. During FY 02, the Department has been involved in the closure of two fraternities because of violations of the state sanitary code. We have also been asked to serve as witnesses in two court cases.

Precautionary Principle

The Health Director continues to be actively involved in a statewide coalition to apply the Precautionary Principle, which states:

“When an activity raises the threat of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not established scientifically.”

West Nile Virus

The Board of Health held a public hearing to consider whether or not to use larvicide in Amherst. Following the Precautionary Principle described above and after careful consideration subsequent to the public hearing, the Board of Health voted against larviciding or spraying Amherst for West Nile Virus.

V. Emergency Preparedness

The Amherst Health Department has a history of working with medical providers in our region as well as emergency personnel and the local hospital. After September 11th, we felt that it would be important to strengthen these relationships. The Health Director initiated a series of meetings with the Fire and Police chiefs as well as the Town Manager. The Health Director has been active in the Massachusetts Bioterrorism Advisory Committee. She serves as a member of the task force on local public health and has helped craft the Commonwealth's application to the CDC as well as its plan of action.

The Assistant Health Director, Julie Federman, became an active member of the local county-wide emergency planning committee (LEPC). This group represents the 19 communities of Hampshire County and includes: Fire, Police, Community Services, Public Health, Media, Emergency Services, Public Works and chief elected officials. The Assistant Health Director has been attending these meetings twice monthly since February 2002, as the only representative of Public Health. As part of her work with the LEPC, the Assistant Health Director organized a group of local public health as well as community service colleagues into a subcommittee (Public Health Working Group) to address the issue of emergency planning.

from a health perspective and to gather input for the larger LEPC group. In addition, the Health Department has begun the task of developing a volunteer medical provider pool. All physicians and nurses living in the Town of Amherst have been sent a solicitation letter, asking for volunteers in the event of a Town incident that would overwhelm the existing emergency medical response system. The response has been excellent, with many respondents willing to participate who already have a background in emergency planning.

VI. Health Policy and Planning

The Board of Health is responsible for setting policies and creating regulations to protect the health of Amherst residents.

Health Planning

The Health Director is an active member of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO). Recently, she was named chair of the Committee to Promote Local Public Health. The Amherst Health Department was chosen by NACCHO to be one of nine demonstration sites for a strategic planning tool called MAPP (Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnership). This is an opportunity for the Health Department to work with the many institutions throughout Hampshire County that form the public health system so that we may better serve the health needs of all residents. To this end, the Health Department worked with the Hampshire County Partnership for Health, the United Way of Hampshire County, and the Strategic Planning Initiative for Families and Youth to gather information about the health status of residents and the capacity of our public health system to provide essential public health services. This information will be compiled into a report that will be presented to the larger community. The public health system will develop a strategy to work on issues of concern.

FY 02 Board of Health

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